

World War 2 - links and activity ideas

The 'reduce, reuse, recycle and compost messages' are certainly not new. During the Second World War some materials were really hard to come by, therefore it was really important that nothing was wasted. Nowadays with the advances in technology and manufacturing, goods are cheaper to produce and people tend to replace rather than repair. Perhaps we all have something to learn by learning about the past?

Rationing and the 'Dig for Victory' campaign

Before World War 2 much of Britain's food arrived by ship from abroad. During the war years many of the ships carrying food came under attack from the German Navy. The British Government also decided that these ships were more urgently needed to carry ammunition, troops and planes rather than food. A period of rationing began which aimed to make sure there was enough food to go around. Everyone was issued with a ration book which contained coupons that people used, along with money, to pay for their food.

People were encouraged to supplement their rations by growing their own food. Householders dug up their lawns, transformed railway verges and some schools even donated their playing fields in order to grow fruit and vegetables and keep Britain fed.

Composting

Wartime gardeners were encouraged to create compost heaps in their gardens. Posters gave people instructions about how to make good compost and encouraged them with slogans such as 'Your Garden feeds you – you must feed your garden'. Composting is still very popular amongst gardeners today as a great way of recycling uncooked fruit and vegetable peelings and cores, paper, card and plants (to name just a few compostable materials!) and as a way of making a useful material, rich in nutrients, which is great for the garden.

Activity Ideas

- Make compost in your classroom! Try out the Composter Cafe lesson plan.
- Set up a compost bin in your school grounds. Gloucestershire schools are entitled to 2 free compost bins per year. Email: waste@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Reduce

During the war years people were asked to plan their meals carefully to avoid wasted food. Radio broadcasts reminded people that they were risking the lives of soldiers if they wasted food because food ships were needed to carry ammunition. Posters were displayed with slogans such as 'A clear plate means a clear conscience – don't take more than you can eat.'

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People were urged to store their food correctly to make it last longer; bread in containers with air holes, milk bottles stood in saucers of cold water covered with a cloth, the corners of which would be sat in the water.

There were harsh penalties for food wasters; Miss Mary Bridget O’Sullivan was fined a total of 10 pounds, with 2 guinea costs for permitting bread to be wasted!

We would do well to remember those lessons. Today in the UK we throw away an incredible 8.3 million tonnes of food each year, most of which is perfectly edible! What a waste!

Activity Ideas

- Design 2 posters to encourage people not to waste food. One for the 1940’s and one for today. Include the different reasons why food waste is (and was) an issue.
- Find out how food should be stored to keep it fresh. See ideas on www.lovefoodhatewaste.com.
- Create a recipe card for a meal made of leftovers.

Reuse

Empty glass bottles which held cod liver oil and orange juice were returned to the shops for re-filling. Milk bottles were put out for the milkman.

Householders were asked to save their kitchen scraps. These were collected by the local council to feed hens and pigs kept to provide local people with meat and eggs.

Even cores and apple peelings were used. People were encouraged to boil them up with water to create an apple drink. Bones were saved and boiled to produce aircraft glue and glycerine for explosives.

Activity Ideas

- To reuse something simply means to use an item again without changing it very much. How many ways could you reuse a jam jar, plastic bottle or tin can? This could be a mini competition for a school eco fair or fete. Try making a bird feeder or a pen pot from a drinks carton, or a rain catcher from a plastic bottle.

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Make do and mend

Along with food, clothes were also rationed. People repaired their worn shoes, patched trousers and unravelled old jumpers, using the wool to knit new ones. Worn sheets were cut in half and re-sewn along the better edges, socks darned and new clothes created from scraps of old fabrics.

Nowadays 1 million tonnes of textiles are thrown away every year. People don't tend to alter or mend clothing, choosing instead to send clothes to charity shops, put them in textile banks or even in the bin.

Activity Ideas

- Create 'Man Bags and Glam bags' by transforming a tired pair of trousers (or shorts) into a bag.
- Invite an older member of the community into school to demonstrate knitting, darning and patching or investigate examples of knitted, darned or patched clothes and the tools needed.
- Try rag rugging using hessian, old clothes and peg tools (see 'Get the Rag Rug Bug' activity plan).
- Hold a clothes swap, jumble sale or organise for a textiles collection at school. Some companies will pay for the textiles they collect supporting school funds.

Kerbside recycling

Aluminium cans and saucepans were collected from householders to be melted down and recycled into planes, weapons and tanks. People were encouraged to sort their waste paper, rags and glass for recycling. This was stored in salvage bins on the street. Salvage monitors ensured that the street's waste was sorted correctly and ready for collection.

Activity Ideas

- Today a variety of materials are collected from homes in Gloucestershire to be recycled. See www.recycleforgloucestershire.com for details of what gets recycled where.

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- Match the types of waste (use pictures to illustrate) with what would happen to them in the 1940's. What would happen to the same waste items today? Why?
- Bone.
 - Pair of child's trousers.
 - Banana skin.
 - Aluminium can.
 - Glass bottle.
 - Knitted jumper with a hole in it.
 - Brown paper.
- A. Return to shop.
B. Unravelled and wool used to knit a new item of clothing.
C. Council collected to boil up and make glue.
D. Used to start a fire.
E. Recycle into a part for a spitfire aircraft.
F. Given to another child.
G. Composted in the garden.

For loads more information, fascinating facts and exciting resources take a look at the BBC and Imperial War Museum websites:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/world_war2/

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/>